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HOW COOPERATIVE EGG AUCTIONS IMPROVE FARM FLOCKS

A radio talk by B. B. Spohn, District Supervisor, Agricultural Extension Service, Ohio State University, delivered in the Land Grant College radio program of the National Farm and Home Hour, Wednesday, August 15, 1934.

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Selling eggs through producer auctions had its beginning in New Jersey in May 1930. This method has become an outstanding success in producing areas which are close to large markets. Eight of these organizations of which I have reports, are now selling well over 2,000 cases per sale. Each of these eight auctions operate two sales a week and handle approximately ten cars of eggs every seven days. This report does not include several auctions in the New England States. The development of auctions has moved westward into Ohio where two producer auctions are now in operation. The Wooster Auction at Wooster, Ohio, was the first such organization west of the Alleghany Mountains. This auction which started July 11, 1932, is located in a heavy producing territory adjacent to such large cities as Cleveland, Akron and Canton.

Auction selling of eggs has demonstrated that the trade will pay a premium for a quality product. Prices received vary directly with the net weight of the case, with the interior quality of the egg and with the condition of the shell. The producer does his own grading and packing. The Association provides inspection service under Government Supervision. This method places full responsibility on the producer for the quality of his pack and rewards him for the time and effort spent on quality improvement. Each producer's eggs retain their identity by lot number through the sale.

The auction member has quickly learned that egg size and shell color, and to some extent interior quality, are inherited factors. When he buys chicks he has in mind the importance of securing them from strains bred for these essential market qualities. Hatcherymen seeing this change in demand are exerting greater efforts to use pedigree males from families of known-egg size and color. Small eggs are no longer incubated in progressive hatcheries. There is even a growing interest in candling hatching eggs for shell quality and density of albumen.

Producers have learned that eggs cannot be handled carelessly and still bring a premium at auction. Fertile eggs must be eliminated as soon as the weather gets warm, therefore males are segregated just as soon as the breeding season is over. Interior quality is so definitely influenced by diet that poultrymen are feeding with unusual care in order to reduce the number of watery whites to a minimum. Hens that once roamed the farm yard, ate what they found convenient, are now confined and their rations carefully balanced to produce a firm viscous white and a yolk of uniform color.

Auction members now regard eggs as highly perishable and handle them accordingly. They are removed from the nest three and four times daily to avoid injury due to heat and due to soiling from broken eggs in the nest. They are being placed at once in cool basements, in wire baskets or on wire trays, to quickly remove the animal heat, and to retain their "farm freshness". Egg storage rooms have been built. Inventive genius has been put to work to create more ideal farm storage. Percy White, a member of the Wooster Association has recently developed a cooling rack where eggs are cooled by a fan which forces cool moisture laden air over the warm eggs. The high humidity of the air in motion does cause evaporation but rapidly reduces the temperature of the eggs. Mr. White can tell you in dollars and cents just what the improvement in grade has meant to him.

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Even the hens are experiencing some new comforts since the inauguration of this method of selling their products. Many producers have installed more nests in order to produce cleaner eggs. The addition of these nests has meant greater privacy for the hen while laying. Dirty houses and dirty nests have proven their short-comings and have been superseded by clean litter and clean nesting materials. Dropping boards have been screened to prevent soiled eggs. Close confinement has created more interest in the insulation of poultry houses thus providing greater comfort for the birds in both summer and winter.

Better flock management has been motivated by at least two factors created by auction selling: first, adequate financial remuneration for the production of better quality eggs; the second, home grading which brings immediately to mind the problems of quality production. These problems are no longer myths, they are realities. They are being met by intelligent flock management practices.